624. 791. 793

Nuer FJ22

[Information on leopard skin chiefs or priests are filed according to their functions under category 624. 791 or 793.]

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

ning in ordinary sacrifices at which he officiates; and Nuer often refer to him in his sacrificial role as 'the cutter of the scrotum'. Does this usage symbolize the principle of agnation? Possibly, for after the sacrifice by which a Dinka is adopted into his captor's lineage it is said *'ca juak tem'*, 'the scrotum has been cut', to signify that the Dinka is now a member of the lineage. If we are right in thinking that it may have this meaning, then the cutting of the scrotum is a most appropriate symbolic act, for the *gwan buthni* represents, as a member of a collateral lineage, the unity of the clan as a corporation of segments, the principle of fission which is in the very nature of a lineage structure. The master of ceremonies receives some of the sacrificial meat at sacrifices at which he officiates and he generally has a right also to the hide or half of it. He has also a right, as I have explained, to a section of any elephant tusk that comes into possession of the family he serves, and the first turtles and the skins of the first leopards and serval cats killed by its sons are given to him. He receives a calf or sheep from the husband's people when one of its daughters is married.

The role of the *gwan buthni* in sacrifice is seen to be a social role rather than one of a specifically religious kind. He does not function in virtue of any qualities in himself. He is a *dwek*, a layman, not a *kuaar*, a priest. He is called upon to make the first invocation when the sacrifice concerns the interest of a whole clan or lineage. His clan or lineage alone is involved or if, as in marriage, another clan is also involved he acts on behalf of his own group alone; and consequently he addresses Spirit in the refraction by which it is represented to the clan—maybe in a totemic refraction or just as *'kwoth gwara'*, 'God of our fathers'. His role in the proceedings is, therefore, determined primarily by the nature of the social activities in connexion with which he is asked to make sacrifice and not by any specifically religious considerations.

II

When sacrifice is made in consequence of some sin or to end certain states of interdiction, of sin-potential—in circumstances, that is, which involve the notion of *nueer* or of notions akin to it—it is desirable, and sometimes necessary, for the rite to be performed by a *kuaar twac* or *kuaar muon*, a priest of the leopard-skin

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782 or of the earth. It might seem that it is in no way here the nature
793 of the social group involved which requires an officiant from outside the family and close kin, but the nature of the circumstances which occasion the sacrifice, circumstances which call for consecration and invocation to be made by someone with special religious qualities. Nevertheless, as will shortly be evident, although the exclusive sacrificial functions by which priestly office is defined have a special sacramental character, they arise, like those ideas of sin with which they are particularly concerned, from situations which require for full understanding a knowledge of the social structure.

793 When the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan first began to take an interest in the Nuer the attention of its officers was at once drawn to what became known as 'leopard-skin chiefs', for these men were distinguished from the rest of the Nuer by the leopard-skins they wore over their shoulders (Plate XIV). It was thought that they were some kind of 'chiefs' or, in the language of those days, 'shaikhs' or 'sultans' through whom the Government might conduct its administration. It soon became apparent, however, that they lacked any real authority; and it is clear that, although the exercise of their religious functions has an important political role, they have no political, administrative, or judicial office. I have discussed the political significance of their religious functions in *The Nuer*,[1] and I limit further discussion of them here to what is necessary for an understanding of the topics treated in the present book.

The word which Europeans have translated 'chief' and which I translate 'priest' is *kuaar* (pl. *kuar*).[2] This person is often referred to as *kuaar twac*, priest of the (leopard-) skin, or as *gwan twac*, possessor of the (leopard-) skin, on account of the leopard-skin he wears over his shoulders. In its original sense the word *kuaar* conveys to Nuer a category of persons with traditional ritual functions. Its opposite is *dwek* (pl. *dueghni*), an ordinary person who has no such functions, a layman. Used by itself the word *kuaar* would normally, perhaps invariably, mean for a Nuer a leopard-skin priest, but combined with other words it may be used

[1] Chap. iv.

[2] He is referred to in all government files as 'leopard-skin chief', and rather than make for local confusion I used this designation in my reports and later, with a caveat, in my earlier books. In a book on Nuer religion I feel that a title should be used which indicates better his religious character.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE XIV

●793

Leopard-skin priest

[facing p. 290]

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

793 to refer to other persons with traditional ritual functions, such as the *wut ghok* or man of the cattle, though this usage is loose and should perhaps be regarded as derived by analogy from its primary use to denote a leopard-skin priest. When the Government chose certain leading persons in the various Nuer communities and appointed them 'Government Chiefs' with administrative and judicial duties and privileges these chiefs became known as *kuar biei*, chiefs of the cloth (the robes of office presented to them by the Government), either because Europeans referred to them as *kuar* or because Nuer saw a resemblance between the robes and the leopard-skins worn by priests. Both are worn over the right shoulder. *Kuaar* became as well the title by which Europeans are addressed by Nuer, perhaps for one or other of the same reasons. The word has thus gained a wider range of meaning.

A more usual title than *kuaar twac* or *gwan twac* is *kuaar muon*, priest of the earth, the word *mun* (gen. *muon*) meaning 'earth' in the sense of 'soil'; and if it were not that in the literature on the Nuer the priest of whom we speak is always designated by reference to his leopard-skin I should be inclined to write of him as the priest of the earth, because the leopard-skin title is taken only from his badge whereas the earth title is derived from a symbolic association with the earth of deeper significance. It is said that a leopard-skin priest (henceforward generally referred to simply as 'priest') will not approach people when they are making pots lest the pots crack; and in this sense he may be said to respect (*thek*) the earth. If anything goes wrong with the standing crops he may be asked to anoint (*yir*) the earth with butter. He may also be asked to anoint seed and digging-sticks with butter
764 before sowing. When a priest is buried, his corpse, so that it will not be in contact with the earth, is placed between hides on a light platform erected in the grave, which is dug in his hut if he dies while the people are in their villages. These and other observances express a mystical relationship of priests with the earth in virtue of which their curses are thought to have special potency, for, as was noted earlier (p. 167), they can affect not only a man's crops
793 but his welfare generally, since human activities all take place on
789 the earth. However, in spite of the power attributed to their curses, I have never known Nuer stand in awe of them nor have I known the power to be used outside a situation of feud; and then a priest's threat to curse is regarded as a routine convention. It gives the

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

793 [789] injured party an excuse to accept compensation without loss of honour.

It is a matter of surprise that the Nuer priesthood should have this association with the earth and take its most common title from it. There is no cult of the earth such as we find in West Africa. Priests are not traditionally linked to a particular territory as are the 'fathers of the land', ritual agents who are such in virtue of being descendants of first settlers, among some other Nilotic peoples. Nor can a satisfactory explanation be advanced in terms of agricultural activities. Nuer do not highly esteem cultivation of crops and may be presumed to have engaged in it even less in the past when cattle were more numerous. Cattle husbandry receives more of their attention and is their absorbing interest, but it and fishing, which is also most important for them, so far as they are the object of ritual attention, are the concern of other, and less important, ritual specialists than the priest of the earth. Moreover, Nuer do not attach much importance to such ritual as he performs in connexion with the crops, and it is entirely secondary to his other functions. On the other hand, it can be seen that the association of priesthood with the earth is a representation which accords with the general idea of man being identified with the earth and God with the sky, the priest being essentially a person who sacrifices on behalf of man below to God above.

793 613 614 Lineages of leopard-skin priests are found in all tribal sections, and in most parts of Nuerland they are in the category of *rul*, strangers, and not of *diel*, members of the clans which own the tribal territories. It is necessary that they should be widely spread, because their services are essential to Nuer everywhere, and it is significant that they are generally not members of lineages identified with political groups, because they have to act as peacemakers between such groups. The two best-known priestly clans, the Gaatleak and the Jimem, have no tribal territories of their own but live, as families and small lineages, in most or all territories owned by other clans. They are like Levi, divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel. Their priestly filiation goes back to Gee, the first man and the first priest, from certain of whose sons the priestly virtue (*ring*) has passed down the generations. However, although their powers are hereditary, and although all members of a priestly lineage can, therefore, act in a priestly capacity, in practice only certain families do so, and these families can function as priests wherever

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

they happen to reside. Moreover, persons who do not belong to a priestly family can become priests, transmitting their powers to their children, by what the Nuer call *tetde*, by hand. This means that such a man is given a leopard-skin by a priest and told to carry out priestly services. In some myths of origin of the Jikany tribes the leopard-skin was given by the ancestors of the dominant lineages to their maternal uncles that they might serve as tribal priests. The structurally opposed lineages of the clan were then in the common relationship of sisters' sons to the line of priests, which thus had a mediatory position between them.[1] A layman is still today sometimes invested with the leopard-skin and the priestly powers that go with it, and I have known a Dinka chosen for the purpose. This in itself teaches us much about the way Nuer regard their priests. Priestly duties are tiresome and ill-rewarded, but somebody has to perform them. Nuer society is very far from being a hierocracy.

The chief services a priest performs are in connexion with homicide and the importance of his office derives from this essential function. Only he can perform these services,[2] which are to release the slayer from the state of extreme danger his act has placed him in and, where circumstances are such that an active blood-feud is likely to develop if a settlement is not reached, to give the slayer sanctuary, to negotiate a settlement, to perform sacrifice to enable normal social relations to be resumed, and to rehabilitate the slayer. All these functions, in addition to having a political significance, are also essentially religious acts or derive from the priest's sacred character.

As soon as a man kills another he hastens to the nearest priest, who draws the point of a fishing-spear down his right arm from where it joins the shoulder and sacrifices a beast, called *yang riem*, the cow of blood. Were the slayer to eat or drink before this has been done it would be serious *nueer* and cause certain death, for the blood which is drawn is thought to be in some way that of the slain man which has passed into him. If there is likelihood of blood-vengeance the slayer then takes sanctuary in the home of

[1] I recorded this fact in *Sudan Notes and Records* (1935, pp. 46–48), but I have only recently realized, in the light of Dr. Lienhardt's research among the Dinka, the significance of it.

[2] Except perhaps on such rare occasions as when a priest himself or one of his family is killed. I was told that then an elder of the aristocratic clan of the tribe might act in the priest's place.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782 the priest, his family and cattle being dispersed to homes of kins-
●793 men, leaving his homestead deserted. He will not be molested
628 there because of the sacred character of the priesthood. For the
783 same reason the priest and any who accompany him can move between the parties without fear and so conduct negotiations for settlement. It is essential that a blood-feud be settled if the parties to it live in the same neighbourhood, not only for reasons of security, but also on account of the serious danger both the dead man's kin and the slayer's kin are placed in by the homicide, a danger in which the whole community is involved. Settlement by payment of compensation (*cut*) to the family and kin of the dead man prevents them from taking vengeance and thus causing a further disturbance of social life. It also pacifies the ghost, who may trouble his family and kin if a wife is not soon married to his name with *ghok thunga*, cattle of blood-guilt. Consequently, even when a man is slain by a close paternal kinsman cattle, though fewer, have to be paid to provide him with heirs, and if vengeance is taken and a man on each side is killed compensation has to be paid for both so that their names may not be blotted out. The payment is rather for this purpose than to satisfy honour. Only vengeance can do that. This is why the kin, even when they are ready to accept compensation, at first refuse it, and why, even after acceptance, a feud is always liable to break out again. But neither consideration seems to weigh with Nuer so much as the need to rid themselves of the condition of *nueer*. This threatens chiefly the kin of the slain, but the kin of the slayer, the wives of both lots of kin, and all their neighbours are also subject to interdiction. If either side eats or drinks with the other or from vessels which the other has used the penalty is death, and it may be brought on kinsmen on either side by a person who belongs to neither party eating or drinking in the homes of both. This intolerable state of interdiction can only be ended by sacrifice by a priest when compensation has been paid, since it requires the consent of both parties. We have, therefore, to distinguish between the cattle paid to compensate the kin of the dead for their loss and to provide the ghost with a wife from those paid for sacrifice, just as we had to distinguish between the cattle paid in indemnity for adultery and the beast paid for sacrifice. This is shown by the fact that should a man kill his wife, though no compensation can be exacted and the question of providing heirs does not arise, he will hand over

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782
793
628
783

to her kin the beasts required for sacrifice to get rid of the state of uncleanness resulting from the homicide. We have here to distinguish also the priest's role in making these sacrifices, which only he can perform and the performance of which is the essentially priestly role in blood-feuds, from the sanctuary he provides and the mediation he offers. The first is a sacramental act only a priest can perform; the others are acts he can perform because people, as we would say, have respect for the cloth. It is a distinction between priestly office and priestly status. In certain cases, as in those of accidental homicide, neither sanctuary nor mediation would be required of him; but it is always necessary that he makes the customary sacrifices if the state of *nueer* is to be ended, and it must be ended if the parties have to come into contact with each other in the course of their ordinary social life. Although today the Government exacts compensation for homicide and takes charge of the slayer, priestly sacrifice is still required before a blood-feud can be settled.

I am not certain about all the details of procedure in settlement of a blood-feud, and they probably vary from one part of Nuerland to another and even from one case to another, but the main, and usual, actions are as follows.[1]

When, usually after some months (the mortuary ceremony for the dead man having first been held), negotiations have been completed and the cattle brought together from the homes of the various kinsmen who have contributed to the payment the priest, accompanied by some of his kinsmen, and when relations are not too strained by a representative of the slayer's party, drives them to a place near the home of the dead man, where his kinsmen have gathered. When, after inspection, all are accepted they are tethered in a neighbouring homestead as they may not enter the kraal of the dead man's family till sacrifices have been made. One of the oxen, called *yang ketha*, the cow of the gall-bladder, is consecrated by the priest, who then makes an invocation over it to God that the feud may be closed. In the course of it he addresses also the ghost of the dead man and tells him that his death has been paid for and that his kinsmen will marry a wife to his name to bear him a son. The priest then slays the victim and as soon as

[1] For a fuller account see H. C. Jackson, op. cit., pp. 102–4; my book *The Nuer*, pp. 152 seq.; J. P. Crazzolara, op. cit., pp. 106 seq.; and P. P. Howell, *A Manual of Nuer Law*, chap. ii.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

782 it has fallen the dead man's kin hack it to pieces in a wild scramble.
793 The gall-bladder is extracted and placed on one side. This is later
628 squeezed into a gourd containing water and a little milk and is
783 drunk by members of the dead man's family and paternal and maternal kin and, if one is present, by the representative of the slayer's party. The priest gives them also cleansing medicines, *wal nueera*, to drink. After this ceremony the parties can eat and drink together without risk, though if feelings have run high they are unlikely, for reasons of sentiment, to do so. Were at any time before it is performed a man inadvertently to break the interdiction a priest would be summoned to save his life by sacrifice and medicines.

Next day before sunrise the dead man's kin go to where the cattle of compensation have spent the night in a neighbouring homestead and sacrifice the one entire bull among them and cook and eat its flesh. The cattle may now be brought into the dead man's homestead and their milk drunk. Some of them are later distributed among the dead man's paternal and maternal kin while the rest are entrusted to relatives to look after, or are temporarily tethered in his kraal, until they are used to marry him a wife, the bride cohabiting with his brother. It is unlikely that all the cattle will have been handed over at the ceremony for closing the feud. The last ones to be paid, maybe years later, are the *ghok pale loc*, the cattle of relieving the heart, and a beast known as *yang tul coka*, the cow of the breaking of the bone, because after it is sacrificed one of its bones is held at either end by representatives of the two parties while the priest severs it in two. The left half of the bone is thrown away. The two parties then consume the flesh together. The earlier ceremony ended the state of *nueer*, and the purpose of this later ceremony seems to be to bring the parties into amity again. These final cattle may not be paid, and the final ceremony therefore not be held, if the parties to the feud do not strongly feel the need for a lasting settlement.

The state of feud, which is a state not only of social conflict but also of spiritual danger, was ended by the sacrifice of the *yang kethia*. But the priest still has a duty to perform, to bring the man who incurred the blood-guilt back into the life of the community. The cutting of his arm put him out of immediate and acute danger, but the death he has caused still clings to him till these final rites, which are like those which end a period of mourning.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

The priest and one or two of his kinsmen escort the slayer to his neglected home where huts and byre are in disrepair and grass has grown up in courtyard and kraal. He consecrates an ox, preferably a black one or one with black markings, utters an invocation to God, saying that compensation has been paid and sacrifice made to remove the state of feud and asking that the slayer may now rest in peace in his own home. He sacrifices the ox, known as *yang miem*, the cow of the hair, because afterwards he cuts the slayer's hair or a token lock of it. It has not been cut or tended since the homicide. The priest then starts to hoe up the weeds in the kraal, and he and his kinsmen to clean up the homestead. He also kindles fire with fire-sticks (*piec mac*), lights three fires, sacrifices a goat, removes its intestinal fat, and places a piece of it on each fire where the flames consume it. The slayer is now rid of the *thung*, the blood-guilt, and can repair his byre and huts and settle down to normal life.

The leopard-skin priest also conducts the taking of oaths. A Nuer may at any time lick a spear or metal bracelet as a sign that he is speaking the truth, and I was told that a man would not do so if he were lying, though he might pretend to lick it. But formal rites of purgation are conducted by a priest. If a man denies that he has killed another he undergoes an ordeal by drinking milk from the herd of the dead man handed to him by the priest in the presence of the dead man's kin. Should he be lying he would die of *nueer*. To kill a man and not to confess to the killing is a heinous offence in Nuer eyes because it puts the kin on both sides in jeopardy. In questions other than homicide, which would usually, I think, concern rights in cattle, the priest digs a hole, representing a grave, and accuser and accused either step over it or take hold of the shaft of the priest's spear placed above it as they make their declarations. Or the declarations are made by them as they sit on the priest's leopard-skin. The priest then utters an invocation over a tethered victim that whoever is lying will die. The late Mr. Hamer, who witnessed this rite, told me that the priest caught the blood of the beast, a goat, in a gourd and mixed it with earth scraped from the ground in front of the skin. He placed a lump of this mixture in the mouths of the two men, who chewed and swallowed it. They then stood up and, facing one another, stepped across the skin. In a text written by a Nuer at the American mission, and sent to me by Dr. Mary Smith, the priest first addresses

793 695 the victim, a sheep: 'now, sheep, thy blood is shed to death on account of the man who is at fault'. He then calls on God: 'O God of heaven, God of our fathers, God who created all things, God of the universe, God of the flesh (*ring*), I call on thee to look upon these persons, that the man who is at fault may die. Now, I know that thou, O God, listenest to my speech (*rietda*).' If a guilty man who has taken an oath that he is innocent falls sick he gets the priest to sacrifice for him and give him medicines, promising reparation for the wrong he has done.

793 782 835 A leopard-skin priest is also, at any rate usually, called in to sacrifice an ox if close relations commit incest. In cases of slighter incest, between, that is, persons more distantly related, some lesser specialist, a diviner, or just the head of the family, performs the sacrifice, or the man who has committed incest himself sacrifices a cucumber or cuts in two the fruit of a sausage-tree. The priest consecrates the ox, makes an invocation over it to God that he may spare the partners to the sin and that the offence may depart with the blood of the victim. The beast is then held down on the ground and the priest inserts the point of his spear in its throat and cuts towards the breast. He severs the beast in twain, hacking its head in two with an axe. As he makes the final cuts the parties to the offence tug at the carcass on either side and pull it apart. One half is eaten by the priest and his friends and the other by the relatives of the principals, the principals themselves abstaining. The priest squeezes out the gall from the victim's gall-bladder into water in a gourd, adds *wal ruali*, incest-medicine, and the principals and their relatives drink this mixture.

793 782 Sacrifices in connexion with homicide, ordeals, and, at least usually, serious incest are the exclusive domain of the leopard-skin priest. If he is called on to make sacrifice on other occasions it is because it is felt that his doing so adds weight to the intention; but it is not necessary that he should act and unless he happens to be a neighbour it is unlikely that he would be summoned.

[793] 789 Since a good deal has been written about the importance of 'rain-makers' in this part of Africa it is perhaps wise to note also that the leopard-skin priest is never spoken about in relation to rain. When questioned, Nuer say that he might be asked to sacrifice for rain and to perform some other and minor ritual acts, such as putting a hyena's skull in water, to the same purpose; but they make it clear that they attach no great importance to these pro-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

cedures. Any Nuer can pray to God to send rain, and his prayers may be supported by placing a sprig of the *nyuot* tree in water, though this is best done, together with sacrifice of one of the flock to *kwoth nyota*, spirit of the *nyuot* tree, by a member of the widely scattered Gaawar clan on account of their association with both rain and the tree (p. 72). Some Nuer said that a prophet's prayers and sacrifices for rain might be effective, and they seem to have had some faith in those of the prophet Gwek; but I found that in general Nuer showed little interest in the subject. They certainly do not think that anyone can 'make' rain. Whoever it may be, priest, prophet, member of the Gaawar clan, or just an ordinary person, he can only pray to God to send the rain. They say, 'There is nothing we can do if it does not rain. God has given us nothing [to make it]. We are merely ignorant folk.' When I urged that surely there was something they could do, a Nuer replied, 'Oh well, the leopard-skin priest may sacrifice a cow [probably a goat was meant] and pray to God for rain, and that is all; perhaps God will give it and perhaps he won't.' When I asked about Car, a well-known prophet, whether he could bring rain, I was told, 'Oh well, he will pray to his spirit [an air-spirit] and ask for rain, but that is all.'

In whatever circumstances a priest acts as intermediary between men and God the virtue which gives efficacy to his mediation resides in his office rather than in himself. Consequently, it does not matter what sort of person he is, socially, psychologically, or morally. The virtue derives from the office having been established by God at the beginning of things as part of the social order. Consequently the priest is a traditional public functionary thought of as having always existed and as representative of man, rather than of any particular men, to God in certain critical situations. Therefore when he invokes God at sacrifice he does so in phrases which recall the universal and enduring character of his role: '*Kwoth muonda*', 'Spirit of our earth', '*Kwoth Jagei*', 'Spirit of all the Nuer' (*Jagei* has here this sense), and '*Kwoth rieng gwari*', 'Spirit of the virtue of our fathers'.

When we examine the critical situations in which the priest is called upon to exercise his functions we see that the priesthood can be regarded either as a political institution functioning within a set of religious ideas and values or as a religious institution functioning within a set of political ideas and values. His essential and

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

793 628 distinctive role is that which he plays in homicide, that is to say, when two social groups, groups of kin and local and political groups, are in a state of violent opposition to each other and the whole community is involved in consequence, directly or indirectly, in a state of interdiction. He functions as administrator of oaths in a similar setting. The oaths either arise out of homicide or concern matters which may result in homicide. There are strong feelings of hostility between the parties; otherwise oaths, with their terrible consequences, would not be taken. Serious incest may provoke similar feelings, because, Nuer ideas about incest being what they are, the persons concerned in it may belong to different descent groups and, indeed, are for various reasons likely to do so. In situations of *nueer* in which hostile feelings are not aroused, as when twins are born or a person is killed by lightning, the head of the family or its master of ceremonies officiates. These are family and lineage affairs. So, whereas the *gwan buthni* acts in sacrifice on behalf of an exclusive social group, the leopard-skin priest for the most part performs sacrifices in situations in which two groups are opposed to one another and which therefore require a person unidentified by lineage attachment to either to act on behalf of the whole community. The priest thus has a central position in the social structure rather than in religious thought, for his priestly functions are exclusive not because, on account of the sanctity of his office, only he can perform sacrifices, but because representatives of neither party to a dispute can effectively act in the circumstances obtaining. As he entirely lacks any real political authority or powers it is understandable that he could not carry out his functions unless during their performance his person was sacrosanct. The presence of a priesthood adds nothing to the dominant ideas of Nuer religion. It is rather these ideas which give to a political role its necessary attributes. Put in another way, the Nuer have priests who perform certain politico-religious functions but their religion is not intrinsically a priestly religion.

613 793 231 Another hereditary and traditional functionary is the *wut ghok*, the man of the cattle, sometimes also spoken of as *kuaar ghok*, the 'priest' of the cattle, or *ring ghok*, the 'virtue' (literally, 'flesh') of the cattle. There are men of the cattle in every tribe and tribal section, and they belong to lineages of a number of different clans, all those I have come across being of true Nuer descent. As in the

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

case of the leopard-skin priestly lineages, any member of a lineage of men of the cattle can perform the services attached to that office, but in practice only some, and senior, persons would normally be called upon to do so. These services have less religious and social importance than those of the *kuaar muon*, and a man of the cattle is not by virtue of his office a person of social importance. One hears of him chiefly in connexion with his ability to perform rites to cure sick beasts and to make barren cows fertile, usually by spitting on grass and beating the animal's back with it while asking God to make the beasts well or fertile. In times of murrain he may sacrifice an ox to God. I was told that after consecrating it he would speak in this vein: 'What, God? Take this ox, it is thine. Thou art master of the world, the world is thine and it is thine affair alone. What, God? Do not kill all the cattle. What will our children eat? No one will live. Oh God, take thy cow and spare a portion of the herds. God, I am a man of the cattle and I have come to sacrifice this beast; take it, it is thine.' Nuer say that he addresses '*kwothde*', 'his spirit', that is Spirit as figured in relation to his office, the God of his fathers. He may also on raids lash a tethering-cord in the direction of enemy herds to ensure booty. He may be consulted about the time of moving to dry-season camps. He is said to sprinkle people with milk in time of sickness, and at his own mortuary ceremony his kinsmen and possessions are aspersed with milk. He is buried in fresh cattle manure. He cannot accept cattle in compensation for adultery with his wife. His curse can cause cattle to die and a man to have diarrhoea if he drinks milk. All these customs and notions give him that mystical association with cattle which is indicated by his title and also by his badge of office, a circle or two of tethering-cord round his neck.

As I have explained earlier (pp. 255–6), initiation of boys to manhood is intimately bound up with their relation to the cattle. It is therefore appropriate that it should be a man of the cattle who in each tribe determines when a new age-set should commence and when it should close, performs sacrifices to open and close the periods of initiation, and names the sets; and this is the most important public function of any man of the cattle. We see here again how, as in the cases of the masters of ceremonies and the leopard-skin priests, the chief religious function of men of the cattle, their formal sacrificial and ceremonial role, is concerned with group activities. In their case the activities are relations

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

793
561

between successive age-groups within the age-set system and not between kin-groups or local and political communities.

793
578

It is remarkable that, considering what cattle mean to Nuer, the man of the cattle is not socially or ritually so important a figure as the priest of the earth. Doubtless this is because his functions in the organization of the age-sets are not so often brought into play, nor so striking and important, spiritually and socially, as the priest's functions in homicides and the feuds that arise from them. There is an opposition in thought between the two. It cannot often happen that a man of the cattle quarrels with a priest of the earth; yet Nuer volunteer the information that if they quarrel and curse one another the man of the cattle asks the leopard-skin priest on what he expects to live if all his cattle die, and the priest counters by asking the man of the cattle whether he intends to take his cattle up to the skies as he can no longer pasture them on earth. Nuer say that since both are placed in an impossible situation they exchange gifts to dissolve the curses. Mr. P. Coriat in a Government Report of 27 February 1931 remarks that some of the Karlual tribe were feeling the need for a man of the cattle (for some reason they did not, I suppose, have one at the time), and he adds that the reason for this is a belief that if a man quarrels with a leopard-skin priest his cattle will not be acceptable as sacrifices as the earth cannot absorb their bones and blood. Therefore the services of a man of the cattle are necessary, so that the sacrifices will go direct to heaven. Mr. Coriat's observation suggests that Nuer tend to think of the man of the cattle in relation to the above and of the leopard-skin priest in relation to the below. This may be so, but I have no clear evidence that the former is classed as a *ran nhial*, a person of the above.[1]

793

As I have said earlier, the word *kuar* may be used in a general sense to describe persons with ritual powers in contrast to *dueghni*, laymen. I do no more than mention the titles and functions of some others than those we have been discussing, because they are not prominent figures in Nuer society and play only occasional and minor roles in their religious life. The *kuaar yika* or *kuaar yiini*, priest of the mat or mats, acts as arbitrator between the

[1] To P. W. Schmidt (op. cit., pp. 2–4, *et passim*) the problem is solved in terms of culture-complexes. With agriculture go mother-right, evidences of which he finds among the Nuer, and an earth-religion. With cattle husbandry go father-right and a Sky-God religion. Nuer culture is a mixture of the two.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

husband's people and the wife's people should the wife die in her first child-birth, and it is possible that he performs sacrifice in the course of the negotiations.[1] The word *kuaar* is also occasionally used instead of the more usual word *gwan*, possessor, in the titles of the *gwan muot* (or *ngul* or *ngul ghok*), possessor of the spear, who performs rites for success in war and hunting (p. 243); the *gwan biedh*, possessor of the fishing-spear, a kinsman of the leopard-skin priest who acts in homicide cases as his assistant in western Nuerland (p. 246); the *gwan nyanga* or *gwan thoi*, possessor of crocodile or of grass, who performs rites to protect people during fishing (p. 67); the *gwan biedh*, possessor of the fishing-spear, or *kuaar juaini*, priest of grass, who performs rites for the same purpose (p. 74); the *gwan pini*, possessor of water, who performs ritual against floods in western Nuerland; and the *gwan keca*, possessor of durra-bird (p. 71). When asked about these specialists, Nuer say that when God created men he designated people to carry out certain functions, and their descendants have continued to perform them. I have, however, never heard *kuaar* used in speaking of the *tiet*, diviner or leech (p. 95). Nor is it ever used of persons possessed by spirits of the air or owners of nature sprites or fetishes, none of whom have traditional offices.

III

Gwan kwoth, possessor of a spirit, is an expression which may refer to what I have called a prophet or to someone who has a sprite or fetish or a totemic or totemistic familiar. All these persons may make sacrifice to their particular spirits on their own behalf or on behalf of others when they or others have been seized by the spirits or desire protection against dangers the spirits are associated with. I have already discussed them in earlier chapters, and here I speak further, though briefly, only of the prophets. A prophet, as we saw in Chapter II, is a person who is possessed by a spirit of the air or occasionally a *colwic* spirit, the possession giving him spiritual powers lacking in other persons, including the leopard-skin priests. The possessed is thus also the possessor.

[1] I have no detailed account of his functions. Mr. Jackson (op. cit., p. 151) gives a different account of them, and Dr. Howell's account (*A Manual of Nuer Law*, p. 54) differs from mine in one important particular. I imagine that the *kuaar yika* was not often called upon to act.

PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

793 792 Some of the chief characteristics of a prophet can be seen by comparing him to the priest. The priest is a traditional functionary of Nuer society; the prophet is a recent development. The priest has an appointed sacrificial role in certain situations of the social life, particularly in homicide and blood-feud; the prophet's functions are indeterminate. The priest's powers are transmitted by descent from the first priest—a social heritage; the prophet's powers are charismatic—an individual inspiration. The virtue of the priest resides in his office; that of the prophet in himself. The priest has no cult; the prophet has certain cultic features. But the most outstanding conceptual difference is that whereas in the priest man speaks to God, in the prophet God, in one or other of his hypostases, speaks to man. The priest stands on the earth and looks to the sky. Heavenly beings descend from the sky and fill the prophets. The prophet is the mouthpiece of a spirit, its interpreter; it is he who speaks but he speaks under its control. We can only understand Nuer faith in their prophets, and also their fear of them, when we know that when they speak as prophets it is Spirit which speaks by their lips, theopneustic speech. The prophet in making his declarations says, 'I am such-and-such', naming the spirit, and '*kwoth a lar*', 'Spirit says', just as the Old Testament prophets say, 'saith Yahweh', or the Prophet Muhammad says, 'saith Allah'. What the prophet says and what Spirit says are all mixed up together, the two being interspersed in such a manner that they cannot be separated. When we reflect on the dangerous quality in Spirit we do not have to wonder at the reverence Nuer show the vehicles of this manifestation of it in their midst. Another important difference is that while the priest has, when acting as priest, dealings only with Spirit in its most comprehensive sense of God the prophets deal with particular spirits, 'spirits of the air' or 'children of God'. God does not enter into men and inspire them. It will readily be seen that there is a fundamental difference, and one that will be still more apparent when a short account of prophets has been given, between the representative of man to the divine and the representative of the divine to man.

792 But though Nuer regard priests and prophets as very different sorts of persons they do not think of them as being opposed to one another. Government officials, who were very hostile to the prophets and described them, confusing prophets with diviners and leeches, most inappropriately as 'magicians', 'necromancers', and